

Dial Tone. by theweakestthing

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Summary:

Jonathan was sat beside the phone, he felt mighty pathetic sitting there while people passed by and glanced at him on their way in and out of the dormitory. Waiting on someone else always made Jonathan nervous, anxious, he'd been let down a whole lot for varying reasons that wildly differed in validity, those times had scarred and hardened him to the point where he found it difficult to trust people.

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Jonathan was sat beside the phone, he felt mighty pathetic sitting there while people passed by and glanced at him on their way in and out of the dormitory. Waiting on someone else always made Jonathan nervous, anxious, he'd been let down a whole lot for varying reasons that wildly differed in validity, those times had scarred and hardened him to the point where he found it difficult to trust people.

He did trust Steve though, the other might have been a little slow on the emotional uptake but Steve always found a way make it up to people when he messed up, it was one of the things that Jonathan really admired about Steve. It was still hard for him to believe that other would call him every Thursday night, he could think of so many better things to do than call him.

The phone rang and startled Jonathan from his thoughts, that heavy tone sent his heart into a flurry. He fumbled with the receiver before he was able to properly hold it to his ear, he almost hit himself with it in the commotion.

"Hello," Jonathan said, he hoped that he didn't sound desperate or pathetically hopeful.

"Hey is Jenifer there?" A voice he didn't recognise asked, Jonathan frowned at the deep grey plastic of the telephone.

"This is the boys dorm at NYU, I think you've the wrong number," Jonathan replied despondently and set the receiver back down.

Jonathan wasn't exactly the patient type, sure he was more patient than Nancy or Steve, but the two of them were exceptionally impatient where Jonathan was just regular impatient. He tapped his fingers against the wood of the desk that sat besides the telephone. People came and went but Jonathan stayed, sat motionless at that desk waiting for the call. He didn't wait all that long, he figured that an hour was a reasonable time to stop waiting, he gave the telephone one last glance before went down the hall and up the stairs back to his dorm room.

Despite the fact that it was a Thursday, his roommate was thankfully not around, they had a steady girlfriend and spent a lot of time not sleeping in their dorm. He dropped down onto his bed and pressed his face into the pillow. There were any number of reasons that Steve wouldn't have been able to call him, a study session that ran late, Steve overslept, Steve was called in for a shift to cover a sick colleague, any number of random accidents and emergencies, maybe the phone line was down? There were two thoughts that permeated and circled his mind though, either Steve was in a horrible accident or Steve had completely forgotten about him.

Jonathan could call Steve, but Steve was a part of a frat and if the frats at Jonathan's college were anything to go by he didn't want to have to talk to any of those people, just the thought of it made his stomach churn. He'd have to wait until either he got a letter from Steve or the next Thursday and hope that Steve actually called him that time. Jonathan figured that he should write a letter in the morning, if something seriously bad had happened to Steve then either Nancy or his mother would find a way to contact him.

He didn't cry, Jonathan wasn't much of a crier and he didn't really have all the facts, instead he fell asleep on top of the covers with all his clothes still on with an empty feeling sinking in his gut as he held back tears. He felt stupid, he kept running through all the reasonable things that could have happened. He felt so pathetic, fragile in the way his father had accused him of being, all those yelled insults that felt worse than the fists against his child's frame.

Jonathan was used to being alone, was used to feeling lonely but that didn't make it any easier. He'd spent days feeling totally alone and helpless in the short years before Will's birth where both of his parents worked to make ends meet. That was when his love of music had started, he felt less alone with someone else's voice and music filling the house. Other kids had never much liked him, sure he'd been able to hold friendships during elementary school but that was when kids were actually encouraged to be friends, after that they'd avoided Jonathan like the plague.

Without their father, their mother had actually been able to hold a better job while Jonathan looked out for Will, things were better and yet Jonathan still felt lonely. Jonathan was older, just into his teens

when his parents had separated, Will needed more attention than he did. It made sense, he understood but that didn't mean that he didn't need the attention.

Jonathan needed some attention, he'd been denied it for so long that he didn't know what someone having a genuine interest in him looked or felt like, he couldn't spot sincerity even if it was right in front of his face. He'd been pretty hostile toward Nancy at first but had quickly warmed up to her strange brashness rather than the innocent nerdiness he'd been attracted to from afar. Steve and him hadn't seen eye to eye at first, they'd even been in a physical fight, somehow though Jonathan thought that it was one of the things that had brought them closer together. They'd come together slow, as though they were two comets drawn together by gravity in the deep recess of space.

The only people he'd ever really been able to talk to were Nancy and Steve, Nancy was at Cal Tec swamped with work, at that time Steve was pretty much all he had. The thought made him feel terribly pathetic. Throughout what was almost his entire first year at college, Steve had kept his word and called him at 8pm on the dot. This was the first time that Steve had ever missed one of their calls.

He scrunched eyes shut and willed the thoughts away, he ran lyrics through his mind as he tried to fall asleep and a short while later Jonathan fell into an unsettled fitful slumber.

Jonathan awoke to a banging on his door, loud and incessant, he groaned as he rose from the bed and cracked the door open. It was a guy that Jonathan barely recognised, he glanced down at his watch to find out that it was just passed 2am.

"Yeah?" Jonathan asked, bleary eyed and still groggy.

"You've got an incessant caller Byers, the dude talked up a storm, said it was important," the guy said, he looked about as tired as Jonathan felt.

"Oh," Jonathan replied, he opened the door a little wider to step out of his dorm, "thanks," he murmured as he passed the other.

"No problem," the guy said and seemingly went back to his room, following after Jonathan, Jonathan didn't notice though, he simply rushed toward the phone.

He took the stairs two at a time, palm flat against the concrete wall of the stairwell, toward the telephone. Jonathan found the receiver off the hook, he held it up to his ear and spoke softly.

"Hello?" Jonathan asked, he forced his voice even through his sleepiness and muted hurt.

"Jonny, jeez I'm so sorry man," Steve's voice came through the phone, loud and relieved.

"It's fine," Jonathan returned, he leant against the wall and stared down the hall. The building was eerily empty and deathly quiet, there was usually someone around but Jonathan figured that since they were deep into the final semester of the year that most were acting responsibly.

"No it's not and don't pretend that it is, I hate it when you do that," Steve muttered, Jonathan could just hear the other frowning, that strangely protective expression that Jonathan simply wasn't used to.

"Well, what happened?" Jonathan asked instead of admitting that Steve was right, he didn't need to.

"Some idiot got super drunk, like alcohol poisoning drunk and you know how responsible I am," Steve explained, he sounded a little ashamed and irritated.

"So you took care of them?" Jonathan said, it was in Steve's nature, even if Steve did walk away he'd come back a few moments later and do the right thing, something that Jonathan both admired and was jealous of.

"Drove the guy to the hospital, ER has crazy waiting times, I'm sorry, I could have called from the hospital but dude was insanely drunk," Steve said, still apologising.

"Who gets that drunk on a Thursday?" Jonathan asked, brows raised as he stared down the hall. He freaked himself out by catching his

reflection in the window of the dormitory doors, instead of looking over at any of the multitude of doors and windows that seemed like holes boring into the darkness, Jonathan stared at the telephone as though it were his companion that night.

"I think his girlfriend left him, it was kinda hard to make out what he was saying through the blubbering and drunkenness," Steve explained vaguely, Jonathan could easily imagine the other standing with his hand on his hip.

"Wow," Jonathan groaned, it was a cliché but it was a cliché that Jonathan could see himself repeating just without a Steve there to save him from himself.

"Yeah he's a mess," Steve sighed, the sound crackled over the line.

"So everything's fine, right?" Jonathan asked after a moment, voice sheepish as he clutched the receiver to his face.

"Besides an upset drunk and deathly ill frat boy staying the night at a hospital, yeah everything's fine," Steve said, his tone had finally come back to something closer to his usual breezy voice.

"You know what I mean Steve," Jonathan groaned, head pressed against the wall, sometimes it was hard to tell whether Steve was pretending to be dense or was actually being dense.

"Between us," Steve said in a whisper, "of course, everything's fine, it's perfect. Hey Jonny, semester's almost over and we'll be seeing each other soon, I can't wait," Steve continued, smile evident in his voice and Jonathan couldn't help but mirror it, forehead still pressed against the wall.

"Yeah, me too," Jonathan murmured into the receiver, he felt a little giddy, going so high from so low. It kinda made him dizzy.

"Miss ya Jonny," Steve said, it wasn't something they often said over the phone, you never knew who was listening. It took Jonathan aback somewhat, he hadn't been expecting it all.

"Miss you too," Jonathan yawned, he ran his hand through his hair and felt the tiredness suddenly weigh down on him.

"Go to bed Jonny-boy," Steve said authoritatively, smile still shining through in his words.

"Yeah okay, goodnight Steve," Jonathan said, he let a little of his compassion for the other slip through then, his tone turned sweeter.

"Night Jonny," Steve replied, tone practically smitten as he bid Jonathan good night.

They hung up and Jonathan made his way back up the stairs in a warm and fuzzy kind of haze, it stayed with him all the way into his bed. There was something to look forward to, besides the calls once a week, Jonathan hoped the next few weeks went by as fast as possible. He hoped that sleep came quickly.